



Senator Feinstein Opposes Attempt to Open ANWR to Drilling
March 16, 2005

Washington, DC – An amendment cosponsored by Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) to halt efforts to open up the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) to oil drilling was narrowly rejected by the U.S. Senate today in a 49-51 vote. The amendment, whose lead sponsor was Senator Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.) would have stripped the ANWR provision from the Budget bill now being considered by the Senate. The following is a floor statement by Senator Feinstein on the amendment:

“Mr. President, I rise today as a cosponsor of Senator Cantwell’s amendment to strike the reconciliation instructions in the Budget Resolution to allow for the opening of the Arctic Refuge.

I am strongly opposed to opening the Alaskan wilderness to drilling for oil. Stated simply—we cannot drill our way out of this problem.

While I agree that we are too dependent on foreign oil, and need to reduce that dependence, drilling for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is simply not the answer.

Reducing oil consumption IS the answer and raising our Corporate Average Fuel Economy - or CAFE - standards is the superior route to energy security.

The bottom line is that, according to estimates from the United States Geological Survey, the Arctic Refuge would likely yield less than 10 billion barrels of economically recoverable oil - less than a million barrels of oil per day at peak production, or less than 4 percent of the country’s projected daily needs—and the oil would not flow for at least ten years.

In contrast, simply raising average fuel economy standards for sport utility vehicles could save us more than a million barrels per day by 2020. The savings would come sooner than oil from ANWR, and unlike oil from ANWR, the savings would not run out. Raising the standards for all vehicles would reduce even further the amount of oil used in the United States.

The United States contains only 2% of the world’s oil reserves and only 4% of the world population. And yet Americans consume 25% of the oil produced worldwide. Almost 2/3 of that oil goes to fuel the nation’s transportation sector.

Given our current level of consumption in relation to our domestic reserves, it is clear that modest increases in domestic production - as from ANWR - will not solve our energy problems. Reducing consumption is the key to increasing America's energy security.

Drilling in ANWR would not save consumers money because drilling would not decrease the quantity consumed and would not affect the world price of oil.

So, unlike increasing CAFE standards, drilling in ANWR would not significantly increase our energy security, would not fight climate change, and would not save consumers money.

The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is a crown jewel of the National Wildlife Refuge system. It is the only conservation unit in the US encompassing a complete range of arctic ecosystems and serves as critical habitat for caribou, muskox, snow geese, polar bears and other species.

The coastal plain, which proponents of drilling paint as small and relatively insignificant, is the ecological heart of the refuge and the center of wildlife activity.

Developing the coastal plain would threaten the refuge's abundant wildlife. The approximately 130,000 caribou of the porcupine herd rely on the coastal plain as a calving area. 135 species of migratory birds use the coastal plain during the summer.

The coastal plain provides critical habitat for many of the refuge's species.

Drilling would also threaten the traditional livelihoods of the Gwich'in people dependent upon the porcupine caribou for subsistence.

Proponents of drilling would have us risk all of this damage for a small amount of oil that would not even begin to flow for ten years and would barely reduce our dependence on foreign oil.

In short, the refuge's coastal plain is too precious, and contains too little oil, for us to allow drilling to take place.

Increasing fuel efficiency is the better solution.

Future generations will thank us for our foresight in protecting the coastal plain and its wildlife. They will thank us for finding other avenues to increased energy security.

Thank you and I urge my colleagues to support Senator Cantwell's amendment."

###